



## *The State of Girls: Unfinished Business*

### *Black/African American Girls*

**The State of Girls: Unfinished Business** is a groundbreaking report from the Girl Scout Research Institute (GSRI) that stakes out key issues and major trends affecting girls' healthy development in the United States today.

This report demonstrates that while there is a lot of positive news, many girls are being left behind. In particular, black/African American girls face significant challenges in making successful transitions to adulthood. Black/African American girls have a greater likelihood of growing up in a poor family and living in a single-parent household. They have higher obesity rates, as well as higher incidence of emotional difficulties and depressive symptoms than their peers. In addition, they are more likely to report being bullied and physically abused by a significant other and also report higher incidence of sexual activity than other girls their age. Finally, black/African American girls spend more time at home, unsupervised, and have lower levels of participation in out-of-school time (OST) activities than their peers.

Despite these challenges, black/African American girls are less likely to report smoking and drinking. Furthermore, even though they have lower proficiency scores in math and reading compared to their female peers, they score higher than black/African American boys. Finally, like Hispanic/Latina girls, they are more likely than white girls to consider themselves leaders.

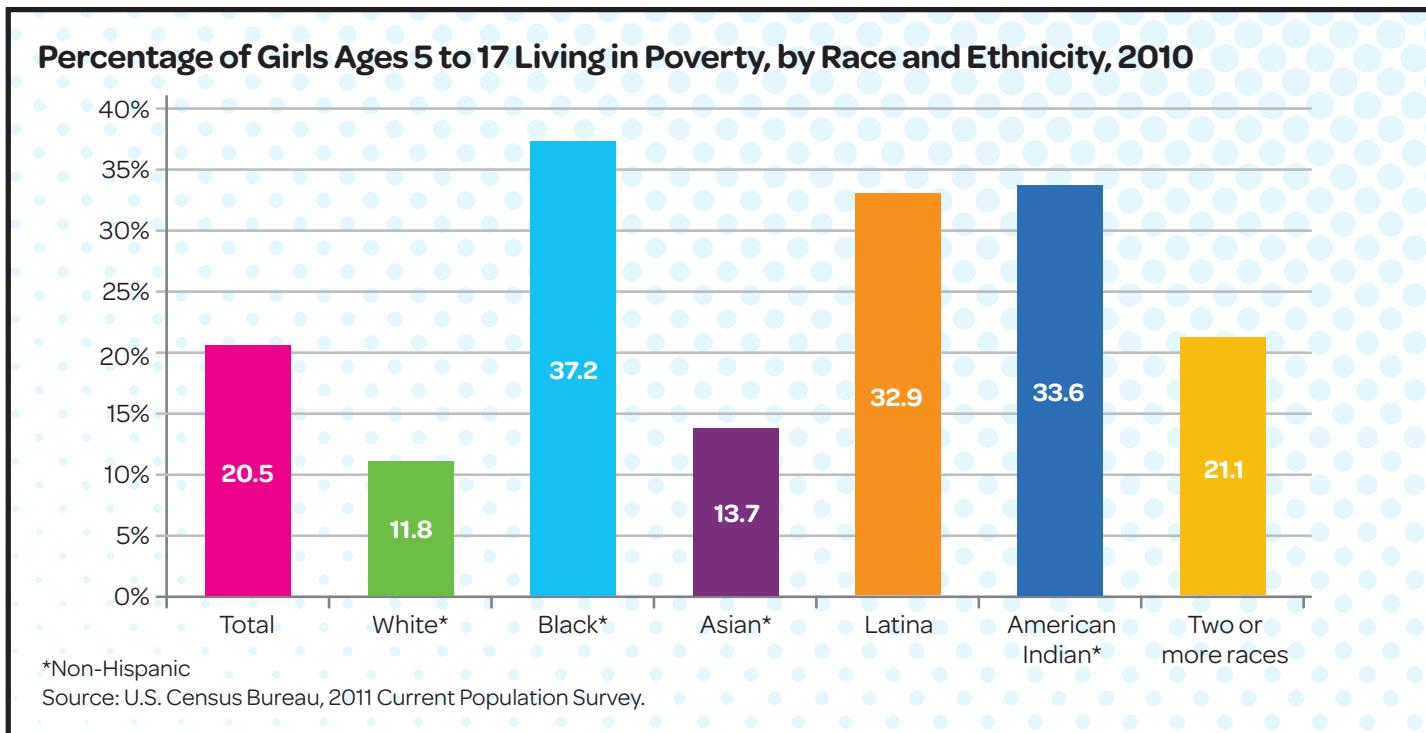
**In 2010, there were 26 million girls in the United States of which 3.7 million were black/African American.**



## Economic Well-Being

Black/African American girls have a greater likelihood of growing up in a poor family.

- In 2010, poverty rates ranged from 12 percent among white girls to 37 percent among black/African American girls.



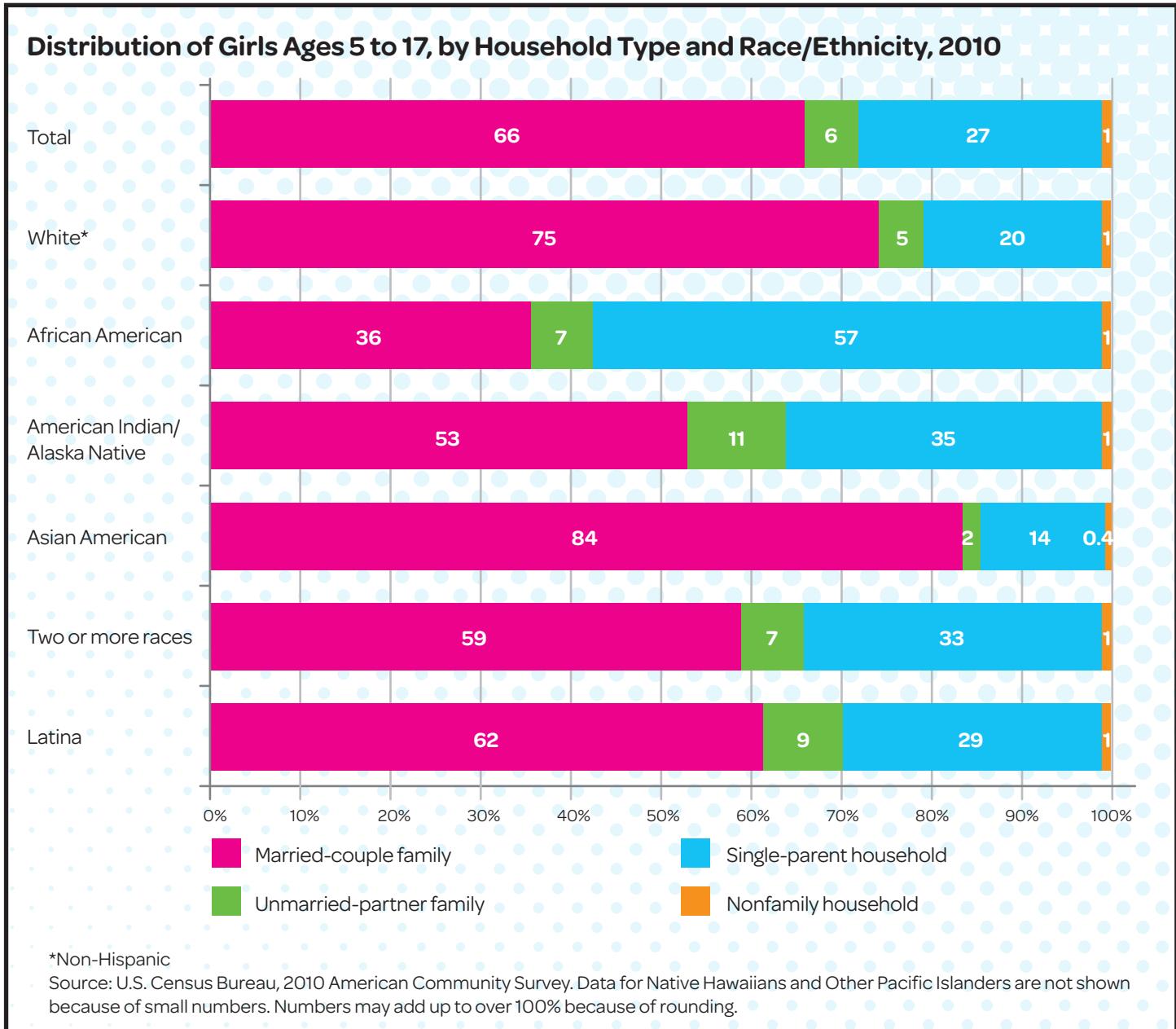
*In addition to having to deal with unstable family dynamics, girls growing up in poor families face a number of significant physical, emotional, and behavioral risks that girls living in more affluent families do not face. Policies need to be in place to minimize poverty and afford girls opportunities that optimize their healthy development.*



## Family Composition

Black/African American girls are more likely to live in single-parent families compared with girls in other racial/ethnic groups.

- In 2010, 27 percent of girls nationwide lived in single-parent families, but the share was much higher among black/African American girls (57 percent).



The changing family structure has implications for many girls' economic and educational experiences. Girls growing up with single parents do not have access to the same social and economic resources as girls in married-couple families, and they are more likely to be poor.

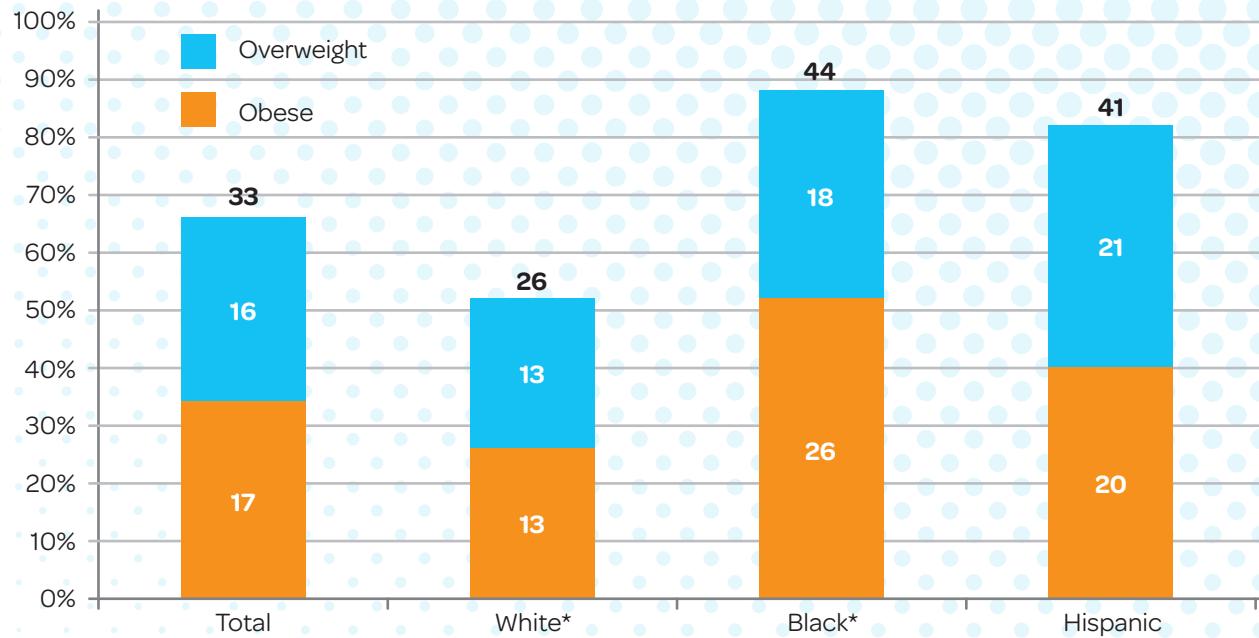


## Physical Health

Black/African American girls have higher obesity rates than their peers.

- In 2010, 32 percent of girls ages 6 to 19 were overweight or obese. Black/African American girls were the most likely to be overweight or obese (44 percent) compared with 41 percent of Hispanic/Latina girls and 26 percent of white girls.

### Percentage of Girls Ages 5 to 17 Who Are Overweight or Obese, by Race/Ethnicity, 2010



\*Non-Hispanic

Source: National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2009–2010.

- Black/African American girls are less likely to exercise daily or be involved in school sports compared to other girls. Among tenth graders, 38 percent of black/African American girls exercised daily, compared to 44 percent overall in 2009; and 52 percent of black/African American girls participated in a school sport, compared to 56 percent overall.

*Childhood obesity rates have risen sharply in recent years, putting more girls at risk of Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, asthma, hypertension, and other health issues. Physical health and wellness is critical to girls' development, academic achievement, psychosocial adjustment, happiness, and overall well-being. All girls need access to health care, better access to healthy food, and opportunities for exercise and physical activity.*

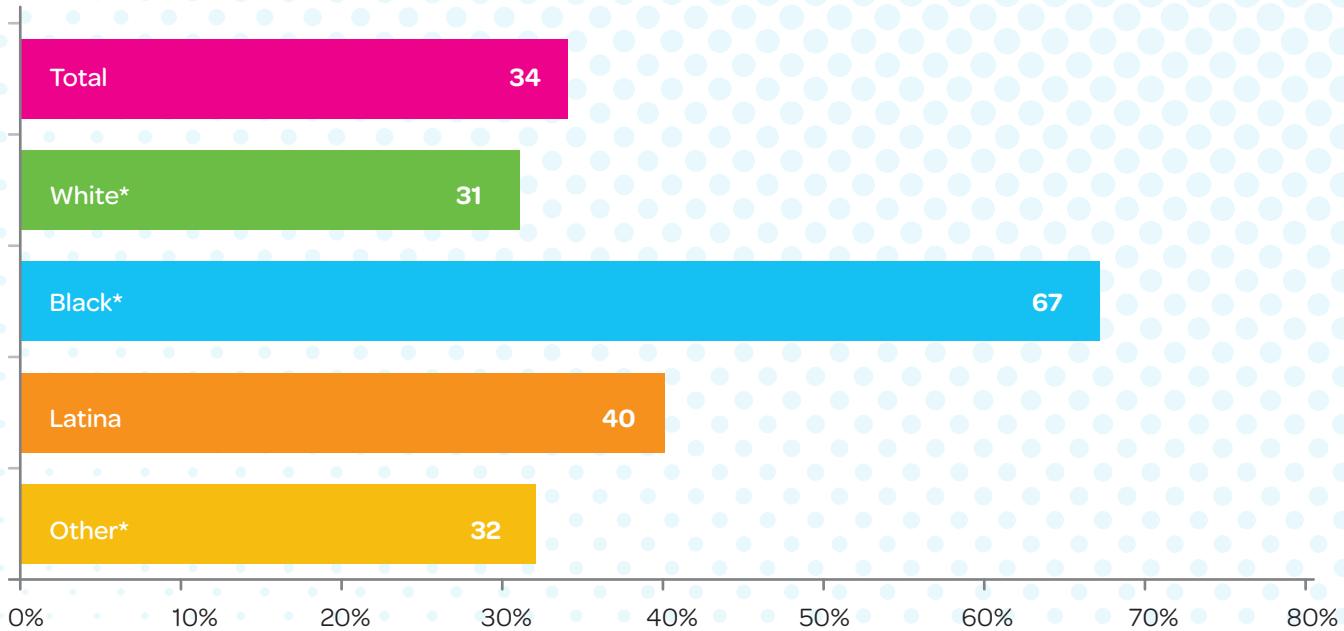


## Emotional Health

Black/African American girls have higher incidence of emotional and behavioral difficulties and depressive symptoms than other girls. In addition, they are more likely to report being bullied and physically abused by a significant other.

- Rates of depression are highest among black/African American girls. In 2009, two-thirds (67 percent) of black/African American teen girls reported feeling sad or hopeless for 2 or more weeks in a row in the past 12 months compared to the national average of teen girls (34 percent).

### Percentage of Girls in Grades Nine Through Twelve Who Felt Sad or Hopeless for Two or More Weeks in a Row in the Past 12 Months, by Race/Ethnicity, 2009



\*Non-Hispanic

Source: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, 2009.

- About 9 percent of black/African American girls reported that they have been threatened with harm, compared with 6 percent of white girls and 6 percent of Hispanic/Latina girls. Black/African American girls are the most likely to report being hit by a boyfriend: 16 percent, vs. 7 percent of white girls and 11 percent of Hispanic/Latina girls.

*Because research has shown that mental health issues in childhood and adolescence persist into adulthood, it is important to promote self-confidence and mental health at young ages and be able to recognize signs of depression or other mental health issues. Relational issues such as bullying should be made a top priority to ensure the safety of all girls. Girls who experience physical violence are at a higher risk of serious mental and physical health problems, including depression and suicide.*



## Risk Behavior

Smoking and drinking are lower among black/African American girls compared to their peers, but sexual activity is higher.

- Black/African American girls report lower levels of smoking and drinking alcohol compared to their peers. In 2009, 12 percent of black/African American girls in high school had been recently binge drinking, compared with 23 percent overall.
- Black/African American girls are more likely to have had at least one sexual partner (58 percent) compared with white and Hispanic/Latina girls (45 percent each). Black/African American girls were also more likely to report multiple sexual partners compared with girls in other racial/ethnic groups.
- A larger share of black/African American girls become teen mothers compared to all girls ages 15 to 17. Nationwide, there were 20 births per 1,000 girls ages 15 to 17 in 2009. There were about 32 births per 1,000 black/African American girls ages 15 to 17.

Number of Births and Birth Rates by Age of Mother, by Race/Ethnicity, 2009				
	10 to 14 years		15 to 17 years	
	Number	Births per 1,000 Girls	Number	Births per 1,000 Girls
Total, all races	4,980	0.5	123,367	20
Total, Non-Hispanic	2,907	0.4	75,349	15
Non-Hispanic White	1,053	0.2	39,975	11
Non-Hispanic Black	1,705	1.2	31,560	32
Latino	2,073	1.0	48,018	41

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, 2009.

*It is important for girls to avoid risky behaviors such as smoking, drinking, and early sexual activity. Adolescent sexual activity not only puts teens at risk of sexually transmitted infections but can also lead to teen pregnancy and births, which can have negative consequences for young mothers and their children.*



## Education

Black/African American girls have lower proficiency rating scores in math and reading compared to their female peers, but higher scores than black/African American boys.

- In 2011, 20 percent of black/African American girls were proficient in fourth-grade reading (compared to 37 percent overall), and 14 percent were proficient in eighth-grade math (compared to 34 percent overall). However, black/African American girls had a higher reading proficiency and higher math proficiency than black/African American boys (17 percent and 13 percent).

		Fourth Grade Reading		Eighth Grade Math	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Total</b>		31	37	36	34
White		40	47	46	43
Black		13	20	13	14
Hispanic		17	20	21	19
Asian/Pacific Islander		46	52	53	57
American Indian/Alaska Native		15	21	18	17
Two or more races		34	44	39	39

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

*Education is important for putting girls on a path toward reaching their full potential. From the need for high-quality early-childhood education to the benefits associated with completing high school and going to college, education is key to girls' financial success and economic security in adulthood.*

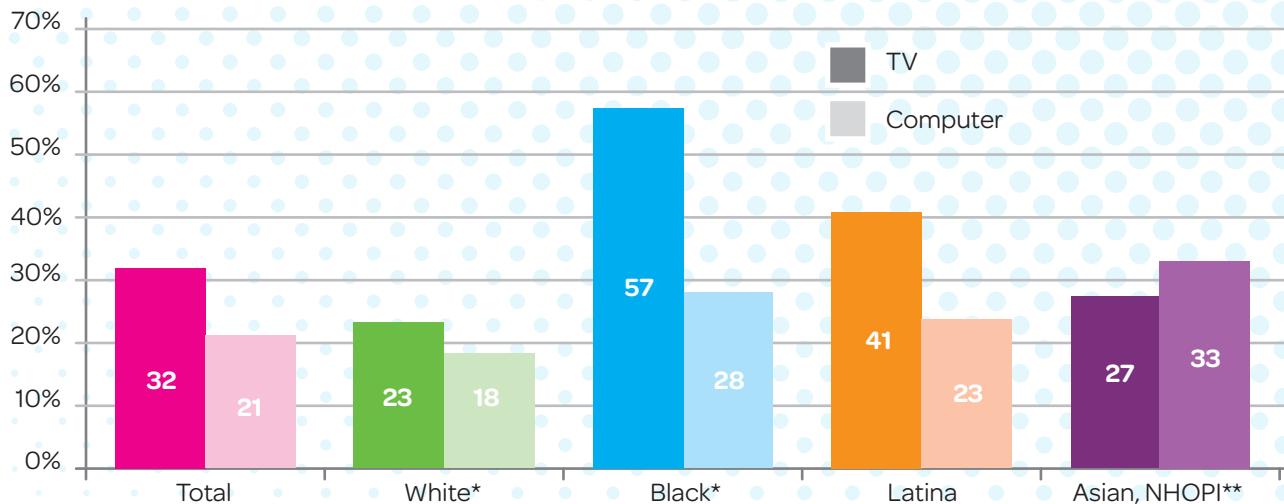


## Out-of-School Time

Black/African American girls spend more hours at home, unsupervised, compared to their peers. They also have lower levels of participation in out-of-school time (OST) activities but report high levels of religious service attendance.

- In 2009, 16 percent of tenth-grade girls were home alone for at least four hours, and black/African American girls overall were most likely to be home alone for four or more hours (25 percent).
- Black/African American girls also spend longer periods of time watching television. While one-third of all high school girls in 2009 reported watching three or more hours of television on the average school day, this was true for 57 percent of black/African American girls.

**Percentage of High School Girls Who Watch TV or Use a Computer (Not for Homework)  
Three or More Hours Per Day, 2009**



\*Non-Hispanic \*\*Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic

Source: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System.

- Sports are the most common OST activity for black/African American girls, followed by performing arts, academic clubs, and student government. With the exception of student government, black/African American girls spend less time in OST activities than white girls but are most likely to regularly attend religious services compared to any of their peers.
- In 2009, 41 percent of tenth-grade black/African American girls attended religious services once a week, compared to 36 percent overall.

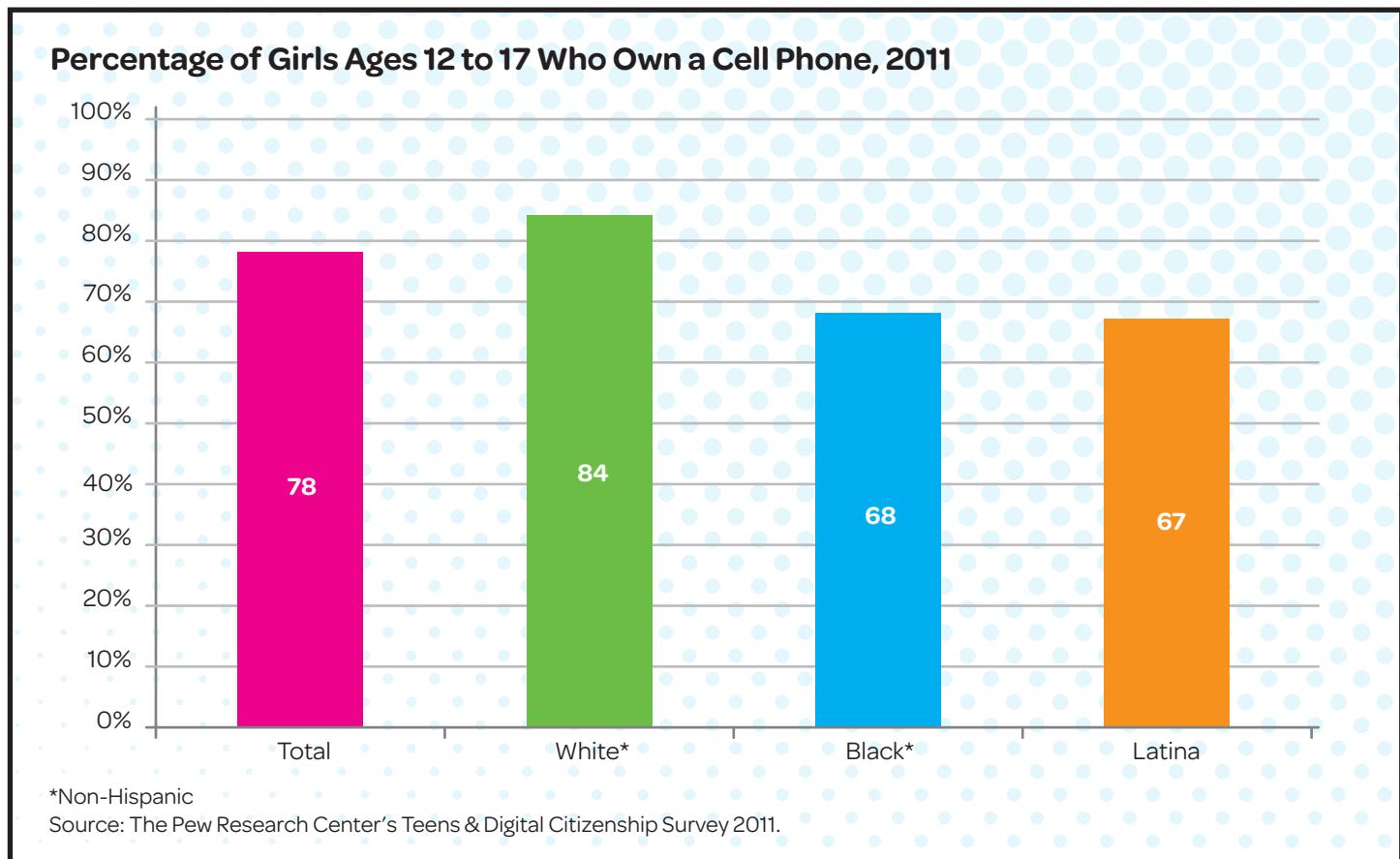
*Participation in extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs, and other structured activities has a positive influence on girls' development and leadership skills. These activities should be readily available in all communities to lessen the burden of child care after school.*



## Access to Technology

Fewer black/African American girls have access to electronic technology than other girls in this country.

- As of 2011, more than three-fourths of girls ages 12 to 17 had a computer at home, had a cell phone, and played video games. However, only two-thirds of black/African American girls had cell phones.



- Among those with cell phones, only about one-fourth of all girls (27 percent) have a smartphone, and this share is slightly higher among white girls than among girls in other racial/ethnic groups.

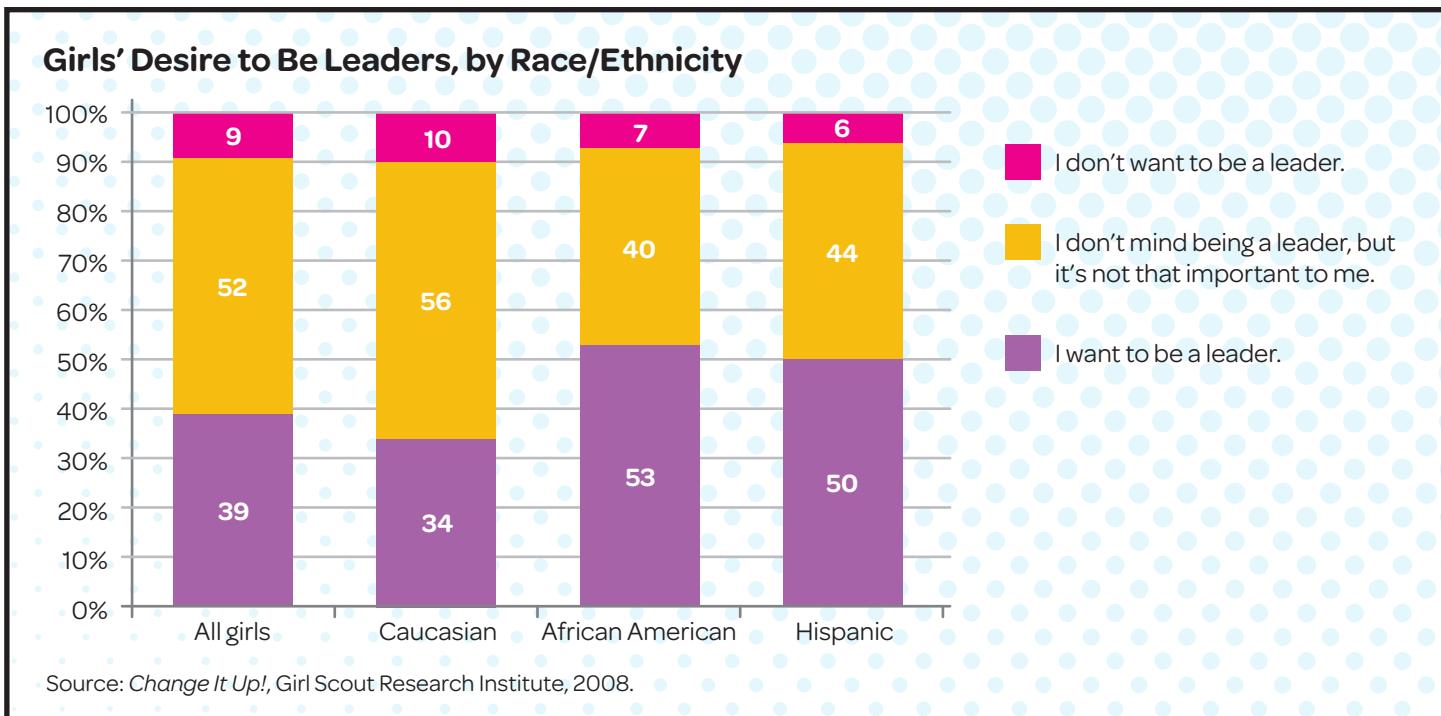
*Despite the prevalence of social media and technology, use and access among girls varies significantly. These differences should be taken into account when working with and reaching out to girls, since it cannot be assumed that technology is universally available.*



## Leadership

Black/African American girls are more likely than average to consider themselves leaders.

- While 39 percent of girls say they want to be leaders, more than half of black/African American girls (53 percent) express a desire to be a leader.



- Black/African American girls are also more likely to think of themselves as leaders. About three-quarters of black/African American girls (75 percent) consider themselves leaders, compared to 61 percent of all girls.
- Black/African American girls (78 percent) are more likely to have leadership experience compared with all girls (67 percent). They are also more likely to have enjoyed their leadership experience.
- Black/African American girls rate themselves more highly on leadership skills and dimensions such as extraversion, organizational skills, creativity, caring, dominance, and positive problem-solving.

*Despite the challenges faced by black/African American girls, there are opportunities for growth, development, and leadership. Black/African American girls appear to connect better with leadership roles and have more apparent leadership aspirations than their peers. Youth developmental organizations need to work with girls, who are passionate about making a difference, to help them foster their interests and continue to build skills around effecting change in themselves, the community, and the world at large. Girls need mentors and role models to help them optimize their interests and skills so they will be ready to take on the leadership challenges of the next generation.*

**Data is not destiny! Collaborate with Girl Scouts to raise awareness and educate the public about the state of girls today. Together, we can mobilize resources to address the most pressing issues impacting girls, especially those in underrepresented and vulnerable populations. Find out more at: [www.girlscouts.org/stateofgirls](http://www.girlscouts.org/stateofgirls).**